

The Paideia Philosophy

What Is Paideia?

Paideia is a focus on the art of teaching and what happens in the classroom for all students; it is not a plug-in program. Paideia requires teachers to use three different teaching modes to convey significant ideas, skills and facts within the curriculum. Paideia was developed by Dr. Mortimer Adler and the Paideia Group, Inc.

What Can Paideia Do For Me?

Paideia can make you, your students or your children think. Paideia focuses on helping all students to acquire, remember, and understand basic ideas, skills, and facts.

How Does Paideia Encourage Students To Think?

One of the Paideia teacher's skills is the use of the Socratic dialogue. The Socratic dialogue is a discussion developed by the teacher through the use of one question that is followed by further questions that focus on students' responses. This is to identify the students' logic, reasoning and understanding. Some examples of follow-up questions are: "Why do you say that? . . . What do you mean? . . . What is your support?"

How Does A Teacher Blend The Three Modes Of Teaching Into A Class Plan?

All teaching modes can be used for different lengths of time. The Socratic dialogue can occur in five-minute interaction or be an hour and a half session. It can occur in the middle of a lecture or a coaching session or be developed into a full-length seminar. Consider the following examples:

The lecture: When the teacher is giving information. No student should have to sit in a bell-to-bell lecture. It is boring, nonproductive and yields poor results in learning. The lecture is biologically demanding for students making it difficult to maintain interest and attention. The Socratic dialogue can be inserted after a short period of time lecturing (e.g. ten minutes) to interrupt the pace and focus attention. For example the teacher can say, "What was most important in what I just said? . . . Why do you say that?"

The coaching session: When the teacher is getting the student to do something. The coach helps the student over hurdles of difficulty. As a result, the coach needs to know what is not clear or confuses the student. The Socratic dialogue yields information about the student progress in understanding the skill. For example, the teacher can ask in a math session, "How did you solve the problem? ... Why did you use that strategy?"

The seminar: When the teacher is facilitating an educationally oriented discussion focused on a primary source. The Socratic dialogue is the heart of the seminar as the teacher focuses the students on the important words, points, and ideas in the primary source. There maybe several Socratic dialogues or one that is developed over a period of time. For example, Mortimer Adler once led a seminar on Hamlet for an hour and a half that was developed from an initial question, "Do you like Hamlet?." This was followed by "Why? . . . Where in the play do you see that? . . . Who else agrees or disagrees and Why?".

Is "Paideia" Just Another Name For "Socratic Method"?

The Socratic method utilizes the Socratic dialogue which is but one of the teacher's repertoire of skills. It demonstrates the teacher's skill in teaching and knowledge of the material. It can be used in all settings of teaching and with all material. It is integrated with other teacher skills -- such as, the art of the lecture and the art of coaching.

Paideia Practice

Tips On Seminars With An Observation Topic

Seminars focusing on observation topics provide rich opportunities for teachers to coach students in their ability to examine and evaluate information acquired through viewing. Objects selected for these seminars include paintings, sculpture, architecture, maps, science experiments and math manipulatives.

As in any seminar selection, careful consideration of the merits and worth of the observation topic is necessary. Reasons for selection can be to explore a period of art history or culture, the intrinsic value of art throughout history, significant artists, significant works of art or the relationships among art, history, science and math. Some seminars may compare two works. For example, two illustrations for a fable or two different types of maps provide a chance to examine two different point of view. Others might compare a work of writing and an illustration.

As in all seminars, setting the stage is crucial to its success. In this case, observation time is added, setting the stage for observation seminars includes:

- Arranging the group in a circle.
- Using name cards with either first or last name.
- Establishing seminar rules and a positive climate.
- Identifying group and individual goals for participation.
- Conducting a silent time for the first time viewing.

The initial observation time is set by the teacher for a specific short period of time (e.g., one minute).

It is always conducted in silence. An example of what the teacher may say to the group is:

Today I am going to show an object to you and I want you to just look at it for one minute in absolute silence, at the end of that time, please write what you saw first and what question you have about the object. Remember, no talking, because once someone talks it disrupts and alters the others' thinking.

A response technique to use to gather information is the round robin. Go around the circle and ask what caught their eye first, and then, what question they have about the piece. This can provide information and questions for an entire seminar. This technique works well for any observation topic used as a focus for a seminar.

Teachers need to be aware of how student understanding of some readings may be affected by student observations of other work.

For example, in one seminar on Washington's Inaugural Address, a student commented that he thought, "Washington was stupid!"

Upon being questioned about how he could support this idea, -- the student pointed -- to the picture, accompanying the text; it was a famous picture of George Washington standing up in a boat crossing a river.

This sixth grade student, who lived in an area of the country with many rivers, then replied, "Anyone who stands up in a boot when crossing a river in a storm -- is not bright! Why anyone would follow him, I have no idea!"

The seminar leader tried to convince the boy that it was not a photograph, and that there might be merits of Washington noted in the text, but it was to no avail.

PAIDEIA PRINCIPLES

1. that all children can learn;
2. that, therefore, they all deserve the same quality of schooling, not just the same quantity;
3. that the quality of schooling to which they are entitled is what the wisest parents would wish for their own children, the best education for the best being the best education for all;
4. that schooling at its best is preparation for becoming generally educated in the course of a whole lifetime, and that schools should be judged on how well they provide such preparation;
5. that the three callings for which schooling should prepare all Americans are (a) to earn a decent livelihood, (b) to be a good citizen of the nation and the world, and © to make a good life for oneself;
6. that the primary cause of genuine learning is the activity of the learner's own mind, sometimes with the help of a teacher functioning as a secondary and cooperative cause;
7. that the three kinds of teaching that should occur in our schools are didactic teaching of subject matter, coaching that produces the skills of learning, and Socratic questioning in seminar discussion;
8. that the results of these three kinds of teaching should be (a) the acquisition of organized knowledge, (b) the formation of habits of skill in the use of language and mathematics, and © the growth of the mind's understanding of basic ideas and issues;
9. that the each student's achievement of these results should be evaluated in terms of that student's capacities and not solely related to the achievements of other students;
10. that the principal of a school should never be a mere administrator, but also a leading teacher who should cooperate with the faculty in planning, reforming, and reorganizing the school as an educational community;
11. that the principal and faculty of a school should themselves be actively engaged in learning; and
12. that the desire to continue their own learning should be the prime motivation of those who dedicate their lives to the profession of teaching.

For more information, see: The Paideia Group, Inc. on the internet.